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AUTHOR	McClafferty, Karen A.; McDonough, Patricia M.; Nunez, Anne-Marie
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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a template for creating a school environment in which college is a reasonable expectation for all students. Drawing from the research literature and lessons learned from more than 4 years of partnership work between a public research university and a cluster of urban K-12 schools, the paper outlines a set of conditions that are consistent with the creation of a "college culture." Some examples are offered about how these conditions play out at the middle school and high school levels, and the paper concludes with reflections on the process of cultural change. In 1979, the University of California at Los Angeles and the nonprofit public interest organization The Achievement Council formed a partnership with 24 local schools (2 high schools, 4 middle schools, and 18 elementary schools) to create a culture in which students would expect to go to college. The project has concentrated on the middle school and high school levels by brining in an additional counseling position to give each school a person who assumes responsibility for creating the college culture. Nine principles have been identified as essential for such a culture: (1) college talk; (2) clear expectations; (3) information and resources; (4) comprehensive counseling model; (5) testing and curriculum; (6) faculty involvement; (7) family involvement; (8) college partnerships; and (9) articulation. (Contains 60 references.) (SLD)

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What is a College Culture?
Facilitating College Preparation through Organizational Change

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Karen A. McClafferty
Patricia M. McDonough
Anne-Marie Nuñez

University of California, Los Angeles
Graduate School of Education & Information Studies

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What is a College Culture?
Facilitating College Preparation through Organizational Change

INTRODUCTION

In families without college knowledge and resources, schools are often the only available resource for providing basic information on why college is important, advising on appropriate classes, and being sounding boards for college choices. Given counselors' heavy caseloads and myriad responsibilities, however, it is clear that one solitary professional can not carry a school's college resource infrastructure (Lombana, 1985; McDonough and Perez, 1998; Monson and Brown, 1985). Changes must occur throughout schools so that the college mission is heard loud and clear by all students. Moreover, these expectations must be present from the earliest stages of an academic career and must be communicated at every opportunity. This is best accomplished through a school culture that encourages all students to consider college as an option after high school and prepares all students to make informed decisions about available post-secondary options – something we have termed a "college culture."

The primary focus of this paper is a template for creating a school environment where college is a reasonable expectation for all students. Drawing from the research literature and lessons learned from more than four years of partnership work between a public research university and a cluster of urban, K-12 schools, we outline a set of conditions that are consistent with the creation of a college culture. We offer examples from our own work about how these conditions might play out at the middle school and high school levels and situate them within the relevant literature on college access. The paper concludes with some reflections on the process of cultural change.

THE PROBLEM OF COLLEGE ACCESS

For many students, early college plans are the most essential factor in determining whether or not they will pursue and/or complete a college degree (Alexander and Cook, 1979). But college plans do not simply emerge on their own. Rather, they must be fostered and encouraged – at home, at school, or both. This does not happen in the same way or to the same degree for all students, and not surprisingly, the most stubborn barriers to parity in entrance to college are in social class background (McDonough, 1997). Often, social class background is measured in terms of parental educational levels, which are strongly associated with student educational achievement. In 1999, for instance, the majority of students (82%) whose parents had at least a bachelor's degree went on to college immediately after high school graduation. Only about half (54%) of those whose parents had not gone beyond high school, and slightly more than a third (36%) of those whose parents had not completed high school, enrolled immediately (NCES, 2001). More often than not, students who are at a disadvantage because of their social class background are also students of color (NCES, 2001).

Despite a generation of concerted policy and programmatic efforts and despite the substantial gains in educational attainment over the past fifty years, African Americans and Latinos remain decidedly underrepresented on the nation's campuses (Horn & Chen, 1998; Nettles, 1991). Most often, Black and Latino students have high career and academic expectations, but the lack of relevant high school programs and school structures tends to doom them to a cycle of failure (Solorzano, 1992a, 1992b). Indeed, the literature shows that a school's culture has a strong impact on students' aspirations and achievement (Falsey and Heyns, 1984; Alexander and Eckland, 1977). An important aspect of a school's culture is the comprehensiveness of the school counseling program.

Typically, the responsibility for providing students with the necessary information and resources to prepare for college has fallen to college counselors housed within individual high schools. This does not mean, however, that the responsibility is being adequately met. School counselors are grossly overworked: A decade ago in four of the ten largest U.S. cities, the average high school counselor-to-student ratio was 1:740 (Fitzsimmons, 1991). These numbers have not improved in recent years and some states, notably California, where the counselor-to-student ratio is 1:979, offer even less advisement than those largest inner city schools. At its best, the current national average of one guidance counselor to 561 students does not allow for much personal attention (California Association of School Counselors, 2001).

Furthermore, over the past three decades, the professional responsibilities of counselors have multiplied and changed. A review of three decades of counseling research, surveys, and professional journals reveals that the relationship between college advising and other counseling tasks has consistently been problematic. The big three tasks of high school counseling today are scheduling, discipline, and monitoring dropout potential (Lombana, 1985; McDonough & Perez, 2000; Monson & Brown, 1985). As part of a larger phenomenon of turning to schools to handle social ills, today's school counselor can also be expected to focus substantial effort on dropout, drug, pregnancy, and suicide prevention, as well as sexuality and personal crisis counseling.

After these needs have been met, public high school counselors may have only limited time for college choice advising. In fact, because of economic hardship, many public high schools have effectively divested themselves of college advisement, with counselors spending as little as 20 percent of their time on college guidance (Chapman and De Masi, 1985). Moreover, to whatever extent college counseling is available in America's high schools, it appears as though students find it less than overwhelmingly useful. According to one survey of undergraduates'

college decisionmaking processes, 60 percent of 1993 freshman said that the advice of their high school counselor was not very important to them (Astin, et al. 1993).

Clearly, if all students are to receive the guidance and preparation that will allow them to make well-informed decisions about how to effectively prepare for and choose a college, we must bring about changes not only in the structure of counseling but also in the cultures of our schools. Past research indicates that students desperately need basic information about college options, particularly for more selective colleges. Moreover, they need to receive it early enough in their educational careers for them to enroll in appropriate classes and make other necessary decisions. Specifically, students express the need for information about college types, eligibility requirements, and the subtleties of competitive eligibility. Often, underrepresented students (typically African-American and Latino students) know the most about community colleges and are most frequently advised by teachers and siblings to attend them to remediate, improve grades, and save money (McDonough, 1999). Secondary and even primary schools have an important and irreplaceable role to play in guiding each student's decision about whether or not a four-year college is an option.

THE "CREATING A COLLEGE CULTURE" PROJECT

Project Structure

In 1997, UCLA, together with the non-profit, public interest organization The Achievement Council, formed a partnership with a cluster of 24 local schools (two high schools, four middle schools, and 18 elementary schools). The partnership emerged from a concern that the numbers of students going to highly selective colleges from the district – and this ethnically and racially diverse cluster in particular – have been declining steadily in the last decade. Unfortunately, both

high schools in the cluster have high drop-out rates and generally low participation by both low-income students and students of color in honors and advanced placement courses. Throughout the cluster, college-going rates are far from equitable across ethnic groups and income categories.

The Creating a College Culture project emerged from this partnership with the broad goal of ensuring that the schools involved devote energy, time, and resources toward college preparation so that all students are prepared for a full range of postsecondary options upon graduation. A key component of the project at the middle school and high school levels has been the support of a new or additional counseling position. Funded by the school district, this aspect of the project allowed each of the schools to bring in a person who assumed responsibility for initiating and carrying out activities that contribute to the college culture. These individuals were first hired for the 1999-2000 academic year. All of the middle schools created a new position (a "college coach"), and the two high schools each hired an additional counselor, decreasing the caseload of the entire counseling staff and creating opportunities to allow all counselors to become college counselors.

Table One presents demographic data for the four middle schools and two high schools that are participating in the partnership work. It is these six schools that comprise the heart of the Creating a College Culture project.

Table One: Demographic Description of School Sites (1999-2000 Academic Year)

	Middle School 1	Middle School 2	Middle School 3	Middle School 4	High School 1	High School 2
Total Students	1017	1060	1522	1187	2703	2060
% English-language Learners	25%	28%	4%	31%	22%	3%
% Reduced/Free Lunch	82%	74%	31%	77%	22%	9%
Ethnic Breakdown						
Asian	3%	2%	3%	2%	8%	2%
African American	22%	19%	61%	36%	10%	70%
Latino	65%	71%	19%	57%	65%	15%
White	7%	7%	16%	4%	15%	12%
Other	3%	1%	1%	1%	2%	1%

Why a Cultural Approach?

Three streams of research evidence have shaped our focus on organizational culture: school context research, school culture and college access research, and school change research. Extensive empirical evidence exists on how the high school environment exerts a powerful influences on students' college aspirations and preparation. Specifically, we know that four aspects of high schools have a tremendous impact on college attendance: a college preparatory curriculum; high academic standards with formal and informal communication networks that promote and support college expectations; a school staff that is collectively committed to students' college goals; and resources devoted to counseling and advising college bound students (Alexander & Eckland, 1977; Boyle, 1966; Bryk, Lee & Holland, 1993; Coleman, 1987; Coleman, Hoffer & Kilgore, 1982; Cookson & Persell, 1985; Falsey & Heyns, 1984; Hotchkiss & Vetter, 1987; McDonough, 1997, 1998; Powell, 1996).

McDonough (1991, 1997, 1998) has written extensively about the need to understand college access from an organizational culture approach in order to recognize schools' roles in reproducing social inequalities. Her research was the first to identify differences across K-12 schools in their graduates' college enrollment patterns and to link these differences to the schools' structural and cultural arrangements. Moreover, her work documented the need for

developing a college culture in order to improve the college access opportunities for students who are low-income, first-generation college bound, and underrepresented minorities.

Early on in this action-research project, we also drew upon the school change and implementation literatures, which clearly document that effective school change must be guided by strong local leadership, reflective of the micro-realities of organizational life, steady (non-episodic), and systemic (not add-ons or special projects) (McLaughlin, 1992). Specifically, McLaughlin cites extensive evidence to demonstrate that:

- Change is effective only in proportion to local leadership, capacity and motivation;
- Staff attitudes can change simply as a result of repeated engagement in new organizational routines (changes in daily practice);
- Real, sustainable change comes from understanding and accounting for the interconnected conditions that influence classroom and administrative practice in education; and
- Ever-present competing pressures and demands in everyday school life will always doom special projects and add-ons, so systemic and on-going change offers the only hope for lasting impact.

In sum, when the culture of a school is successfully transformed to the point that all students see college as an option and are able to make decisions about their futures in informed, reasonable ways, then the impact of the program is longer-term and much more profound.

Data Sources

This paper describes a set of conditions that we believe are indicative of a college culture. These conditions were generated inductively from our partnership work. In other words, in the context of the partnership, each school worked toward the general goal of a "college culture" according to the school site's particular needs, constraints, and resources. The resulting activities converged to form the nine principles of a college culture that we describe in later sections of

this paper. Hence, a significant portion of the "data collection" has consisted of careful tracking of the project activities.

Additional data collection is useful in that it allows for a greater degree of understanding of how cultural change does (or does not) take place in a school setting. So while – as an action research project – the primary focus of this work has been on real and significant change that will directly benefit the students in the cluster, a secondary, though still important, emphasis has been data collection. Detailed fieldnotes describing project meetings and gatherings have been created and drawn upon for this paper. Similarly, curricular materials, newsletters, and other similar items generated by the participating schools have also been used as data. Finally, we conducted interviews with key project personnel including school principals and college counselors and coaches. The interviews addressed a range of topics from respondents' perceptions of and experiences with the project to their understandings of the goals of the work. These interviews – together with the supplemental data described above – help to clarify the relevance of each of the nine principles described below. These data also reveal the ways in which an urban, public university can serve as both a partner and a resource in a collaborative, participatory action research project designed to bring about cultural change. (Please see McClafferty & McDonough, 2000 for a more detailed discussion of this particular issue.)

THE PRINCIPLES OF A COLLEGE CULTURE

Over the project's four years of implementation, several conditions necessary to the achievement of the broader project goal became apparent. Specifically, in order to achieve the goal of preparing all students for a full range of postsecondary options, the following conditions must exist:

- School leadership is committed to building a college culture;
- All school personnel provide a consistent message to students that supports their quest for a college preparatory K-12 experience;
- All counselors are college counselors; and
- Counselors, teachers, and parents are partners in preparing students for college.

While these four conditions are an important step in making the notion of a college culture more concrete, they are not a sufficient guide for a school that is interested in undertaking the creation of such a culture. Indeed, in order to meet these more specific objectives, some specific school characteristics must be developed. As such, the remainder of the paper describes nine "Principles of a College Culture" that are designed to allow schools to determine the extent to which they are currently fostering a college culture and the steps they might take in the future to strengthen that culture. The nine principles are as follows:

- College Talk
- Clear Expectations
- Information and Resources
- Comprehensive Counseling Model
- Testing and Curriculum
- Faculty Involvement
- Family Involvement
- College Partnerships
- Articulation

Each of the descriptions begins with a one-paragraph summary of the principle. We use these summaries to communicate the essence of the principles to individuals at our partner school sites as well as to other school sites that are interested in the work. Each summary is then followed by a detailed description of the principle, drawing from extensive searches of the research literature on college access as well as the experiences, needs, and priorities of team members at the local school sites.

The reader will quickly notice that there is a good deal of overlap between the categories. The nine principles described in the pages that follow are not intended to be mutually exclusive.

On the contrary, they are meant to be understood as a highly integrated, complementary system of ideas that draw from and benefit from each other.

In some cases, the voices of the college coaches, counselors, and principals are included in the descriptions of the principles through direct quotations. In others, their voices are heard through our descriptions of their best practices. In either case, it is important to once again stress that the ideas presented in the pages that follow emerged directly from practice, informed by careful investigations into the college access literature. The nine principles grew out of our ongoing partnership with a group of urban schools committed to preparing more students for college application and admission. In that sense, they are firmly rooted in the realities of public schools and, we hope, useful to those who work within that context.

College Talk

A college culture requires clear, ongoing communications with students about what it takes to get to college, so that they understand what is required and expected of them if they want to stay on a college path. Faculty and administrators share their own experiences and discover their own assumptions about their roles in preparing students for college. Through this College Talk, a college culture becomes clearer and the college preparation process becomes more effective.

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One common thread running through the research evidence on organizational culture is the need to understand the role of formal and informal communication networks. Perrow (1979) has shown how individual behavior is influenced by the flow and content of information, especially in how information highlights or downplays specific options. Organizational information flows are, in turn, based on assumptions about how familiar participants (students) are with basic information, prerequisites, and specialized vocabularies. Other research has found that school staff members affect students' college plans in daily interactions, even without directly exposing students to specific college preparatory programs, by being knowledgeable about and constantly talking about college, thereby reinforcing expectations (Hotchkiss & Vetter, 1987). McDonough (1997, 1998) has shown that effective college cultures invisibly and seemingly effortlessly shape students' college preparation and decision-making through interactions with knowledgeable staff who inform students about college requirements, vocabularies, and resources.

So what is college talk? It is the verbal and non-verbal forms of communication between and across teachers, students and parents. In the case of the Creating a College Culture project it has taken the form of posters on the wall, newsletters, and newspaper columns. Students benefit from ever-present reminders of college expectations manifested in written and verbal missives and activities designed to highlight the college paths of school staff, for example. College talk can be encouraged through time allocated for teachers to develop curriculum, share ideas, and plan together to infuse class exercises with college content. Finally, college talk can be operationalized through agenda items on school site councils, parent-teacher associations and department meetings. One school principal, for instance, sat down with his entire faculty in small

groups to talk about their paths to college and to raise their awareness of their own role in preparing students for college.

In the words of a college coach involved with the project, a college culture "means students are hearing different things about college. And they're not just hearing it once. They're hearing it constantly." A principal echoed this sentiment saying that in a school with a college culture, "every adult is talking about what they're doing with their children (related to college). ...Everybody talks about it, everybody's involved in it. ... teachers, students, parents, the cafeteria people, everybody." This is college talk.

Clear Expectations

All students are to be prepared for a full range of postsecondary options and the explicit goals of this preparation must be clearly defined, communicated, and a part of the daily culture of the school, such that students, family, teachers, administrators and staff recognize the role that each plays in preparing students for college.

Students' own educational expectations play a major role in college aspirations and enrollment (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000; Hearn, 1987) and oftentimes are the single strongest predictor of four-year college attendance (Thomas, 1980). Longstanding college goals increase the likelihood of attending college (Alexander & Cook, 1979). If these college expectations are developed by the eighth grade, they can stimulate planning for college as well as motivate students to maintain high grades and engage in necessary extracurricular activities (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000; Hossler, Schmit & Vesper, 1999; McDonough, 1997). Having college plans by the eighth grade is also an essential precondition to planning for a college-track curriculum and extracurricular activities in high school, in maintaining good academic performance, and ensuring college enrollment (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000). In order to flourish, however, students' expectations must be nurtured by the adults who surround them.

The expectations that teachers and counselors have of students are integral to the development and maintenance of college aspirations. A student's plans for college are affected by the normative expectations that exist among the students, parents, and faculty of a high school (McDonough, 1997). Those students for whom the expectations do not exist are never given the chance to make it to college because they are denied the support, information, and resources necessary to get there. Clearly, high schools must set high expectations for all students, and must create enabling school conditions so that students' college choices are not limited in ways that are beyond their control.

What do explicit goals about being prepared for a full range of postsecondary options and a clear understanding of parents, teachers and students' roles in college preparation look like? Schools with clear expectations have mission statements, strategic plans, and/or visions that specifically reference college expectations. Students benefit from four-year counseling plans that enable students to become and remain organized vis-à-vis appropriate college-preparatory courses. Moreover, there is an expectation that teachers, counselors, and administrators will talk with students about college, and this expectation is delineated in their job descriptions. Finally, clear expectations mean that educators continually ask themselves how, when, and by whom students are identified as college material.

In order to clarify expectations in the Creating a College Culture project, vertical teams (consisting of teachers, counselors, administrators, and parents from all cluster schools) participated in a day-long seminar on the creation of a college culture. Topics ranged from what the research tells us about building college aspirations and choosing colleges to the articulation of clear and integrated goals toward achieving project objectives. Regular meetings with key counseling staff from all participating schools have also allowed for the articulation and

clarification of project goals as they have emerged. To be sure, this principle ties closely to college talk in that ongoing communication about college preparation is essential to developing clear expectations for students.

Information & Resources

Students must have access to information and resources related to college. This information must be comprehensive, up-to-date and easily accessible. Although counselors are likely to have primary responsibility for collecting and maintaining resources, school faculty should be aware of what's available and incorporate it into daily classroom practices on a regular basis.

Hossler, Schmit, and Vesper (1999) delineate three important stages in the college choice process: predisposition, search, and choice. More precisely, students must first develop plans for college, then raise their awareness of the range of possible options, and finally choose among those options. The availability of accurate and up-to-date information at each of these three stages is essential if a student is to make informed, reasonable decisions about his or her educational future.

In the first stage, predisposition, students must know what is possible and what is reasonable to aspire toward. This knowledge can be derived most directly from an understanding of the various types of colleges and universities, their admissions requirements, and their costs. These same pieces of information are essential to a student as he or she explores the colleges and universities that may be options for the future. And perhaps most importantly, in the choice stage, students need access to useful and plentiful information as they process all that they have learned and narrow down their options to a manageable number from which to choose. As students progress through these stages, they are at varying levels of readiness to ask questions or to actively seek out information on their own (Schmit, 1991). Hence, they are heavily dependent on their schools, particularly in the early stages, to assist them in developing an understanding of

what questions to ask and which directions to explore. Drawing from the work of Hotchkiss and Vetter (1987), it is clear that each of these stages is strongly influenced by both purposeful sharing of information and more subtle messages communicated through the presence (or absence) of vital resources.

In a school with a college culture, schools and families are ready and willing partners in all stages of the information-gathering process that is associated with college choice. How can this occur? In the case of the project being described in this paper, college centers have been created at the middle school level, and the hours of the existing centers at the high school level have been expanded. The counseling staff is now available throughout the day and all counselors are prepared to talk about college not only with students, but also with teachers and family members. In order to share college-related information more broadly, workshops for high school students and parents of students at all levels have been offered throughout the school years. Counselors, teachers, and administrators – in addition to parents and students – are encouraged to attend so that their college knowledge is up-to-date, as well. One principal talked specifically about the information his school shares with parents:

> We have more information going out to parents not only in the school newsletter, which goes out monthly, but also in various mailings to parents to let them know what our expectations are about college and what we expect our students to do. (We're) keeping it on their minds. It's the saturation with information and ideas so that they know it's important.

Indeed, it is this saturation with information that is the key. It is not enough to have college catalogs, CD-ROMS, career guides, and other college-related material on campus. These resources are important, to be sure. But if they are hidden neatly away in a counseling center and can only be accessed by students who are already considered "college bound," they are of limited benefit to a school that seeks to create a college culture. Instead, the information and resources must be shared at

every opportunity with a full range of students, educators, and family members. In this way, all students receive the same opportunity to aspire to and eventually attend college.

Comprehensive Counseling Model

In a school with a successful college culture, all counselors are college counselors. All student interactions with counseling staff become opportunities for college counseling. All counselors are informed about college issues. All decisions about students' coursework and career options are made with all postsecondary options in mind.

High schools have varied structural arrangements for counseling in general, and college advising in particular. In most cases, counselors create and implement the school's normative expectations for students' college destinations and how to prepare for them. Guidance and counseling staff then are the key to establishing a school's college culture. They create a worldview for students and their parents that delimits the full universe of 3000 possible college choices into a smaller range (from one to eight schools, typically) of cognitively manageable considerations. Schools and counselors construct this worldview in response to their perceptions of the parents' and community's expectations for appropriate college destinations, combined with their own knowledge and experience base (McDonough 1997).

Students and parents need more than information, they need professional advisers who can interact with them in order to make sense of that information, explain it, personalize it, offer specific insights, or answer questions (McDonough, 1999). In families without college knowledge and resources, counselors are crucial links to the college world. They can help by advising on appropriate classes, providing basic information on why college is important, and being a sounding board for college choices. Moreover, counselors can help all students in dealing with the stresses and pressures that come with pursuing college eligibility and competitive eligibility in high school.

As noted above, counselors have myriad responsibilities and ever-increasing caseloads. Moreover, graduate training and certificate programs for counselors rarely offer coursework in college advising tasks and competing organizational priorities of scheduling, testing and discipline (to name only the top three) often structurally inhibit counselors from being able to acquire up-to-date college knowledge (McDonough, 2002). A comprehensive counseling model takes these structural barriers into account, allowing counselors the time and opportunity to acquire the skills and knowledge that will allow them to play their role in preparing all students for college. This model also requires counselors to work in partnership with parents, teachers, and administrators to share this college information, ensuring that it reaches all students.

So how does one construct a comprehensive counseling model where all counselors are college counselors? First, an overall assessment of the current counseling operation provides essential information about a school's policies, resources, and organizational structures and offers insight into whether and how high school students are encouraged and assisted to go to college. Fundamentally, these organizational arrangements and policies are the artifacts of a school's decisions about what is important, and how and why school resources are allocated as they are. This sort of analysis of the schools involved in the Creating a College Culture project led the two high schools to restructure their counseling departments so that all counselors became college counselors. In this role, all high school counselors now attend university-sponsored college counseling conferences and thus keep their own college knowledge up to date. At the middle school level, the college coach position was established to provide a direct link for families, students, and teachers to college-related information.

In order to conduct this type of analysis, data can be gathered and assessed about recent graduates' college destinations, counselor caseloads, counselors' college advising strengths and

weaknesses, and time allocated for meeting with students en masse versus individual counseling sessions. An interested department or school might also ask: What professional development opportunities for counselors are provided and how often? What are the communication vehicles used by the counseling office and how effective are they? How do counselors convey information to students and parents? How do counselors convey information to teachers and/or engage them in developing curricula that convey college messages? These sorts of questions can lead to a new understanding of how students are being served and where the opportunities for strengthening the role of counseling exist.

Testing & Curriculum

> *Standardized tests like the PSAT and SAT are critical steps on the path to college. Students must be knowledgeable about these tests and be aware of testing dates. Moreover, the school must make a commitment to providing the resources necessary to ensure both that students are prepared for the tests, and that testing fees are not a barrier to any student's ability to take the tests. This includes ensuring access to preparatory coursework like algebra and geometry. Moreover, the school must ensure that students have access to coursework that ensures their eligibility to apply to college upon graduation.*

Two critical steps on the path to college are taking a curriculum that prepares one for college-level work and the necessary standardized tests to apply to college, including the SAT, ACT, and SAT subject tests. Many students, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, fail to pass through these stages of the pipeline (Adelman, 1999; Choy, Horn, Nuñez, & Chen, 2000). Algebra, in particular, often serves as a gatekeeper of sorts, preparing students for both vital tests and advanced coursework. As such, the middle school grades – where most students who attend college begin algebra – are absolutely critical in this respect (Carnegie Corporation, 1989; Oakes, 1990). In spite of all we know about the importance of testing and curriculum in college preparation, many students finish high school without completing the courses or examinations that make them eligible (or competitive) in the college application process.

Controlling for academic ability, minority students and those whose parents have less education have less access to – and are unfortunately less likely to enroll in – college preparatory courses (Horn & Nuñez, 2000; Lee & Ekstrom, 1987; Oakes, 1985; Oakes, 1990). For example, results from a national study indicated that among eighth grade students with the highest level of math proficiency, those whose parents had not gone to college were less likely to report that their parents encouraged them to take algebra, less likely to discuss SAT or ACT preparation with their parents, and more likely to report that they chose their high school programs alone (Horn & Nuñez, 2000).

These findings are echoed in research that shows actual trends in curricular and test taking patterns. In California, for example, the California Postsecondary Education Commission (2001) reports that only 35.6% of 1999 high school graduates completed the full college preparatory curricula. And while these numbers are slightly higher for White (41%) and Asian (55%) students, they are even lower for Black (26%), Latino (22%), and Native American students (23%). These trends are similar with respect to SAT and ACT completion as well as advanced placement (AP) enrollment. African American students, for example, took the AP examination at less than half the overall test-taking rate of 17.9%.

In the context of the Creating a College Culture project, college coaches regularly visit classrooms to offer presentations on college and to work with students to develop their academic ability and organizational skills. At the curricular access level, conversations with principals from across the cluster early in the project addressed the need to change the master schedule to accommodate greater numbers of students in key courses such as algebra and foreign languages. A district level requirement that all students complete algebra in middle school was implemented during the time this project was conducted.

Additional changes were made in the schools that broadened access to test-taking for students. For example, one high school created "Test Fest," a single Tuesday in October when all students were involved in testing, including the PSAT. Because the College Board does not currently offer fee waivers for tenth graders, the college counselor was able to raise funds to pay the PSAT registration fee, ensuring that all sophomores in the school could take part. Across the cluster's middle schools, students had the opportunity to take part in PSAT preparation classes and to take a practice exam. Together, these changes have helped to ensure that greater numbers of students are academically qualified to apply for and be admitted to four year colleges upon high school graduation.

Faculty Involvement

> *School faculty must be active partners in the creation and maintenance of a college culture. They should be kept up-to-date on important information related to college knowledge (e.g., admissions requirements, types of institutions, etc.) and be provided with ongoing professional development to allow them to play an active role in preparing students to aspire to, apply to, and attend college. This should include integrating college information and the very idea of college into regular classroom activities. Faculty must make themselves available to parents to answer any questions and make decisions about students' academic futures.*

As described elsewhere, counselors have myriad responsibilities, overwhelming caseloads, and precious little time to devote to college guidance (Chapman and De Masi, 1985; Lombana, 1985; McDonough and Perez, 1998; Monson and Brown, 1985). Classroom teachers spend up to 35 hours per week interacting with students (NCES, 1997; Sparks, 1994). Hence, if all students are to receive the guidance and preparation that will allow them to make well-informed decisions about how to effectively prepare for and choose a college, the faculty can and should share the responsibility. Indeed, past research reinforces what educators often instinctively know – that teachers play a vital role in helping students make decisions about college and preparing them for their educational futures (McDonough and Antonio, in press).

Faculty involvement in preparing students for college can take various forms. In other sections we have described the importance of college talk, clear expectations, and a rigorous curriculum and testing program. These three factors must all come in to play as teachers question and strengthen their own roles in the creation of a college culture. This may take the form of college decorations in the classroom or teacher visits to the counseling office to keep up-to-date on college-related information. In the case of the Creating a College Culture project, teachers have begun to adapt lesson plans to incorporate a college message into the regular school day. Similarly, at both the high school and middle school level, mathematics and English teachers have worked with counselors and students following the SAT and PSAT to interpret scores and reinforce key subject matter.

It is important to note that during their interviews some principals spoke of potential resistance from teachers who may perceive discussions about college as detracting from their instructional time. Our understanding of faculty involvement is not one where teachers take on an additional role. Rather, they begin to see their existing role in a different light. This is perhaps best expressed by a principal who, when asked how she would know when a college culture existed at her school, responded, "I think...when I walk into a class and the teacher is presenting college materials as part of their lesson. They do it because that's what we do here."

Family Involvement

> *Parents and/or other family members must become informed partners in the process of building a college culture. They must be provided with opportunities to gain knowledge about the college planning process as well as be made aware that their children are "college material." The counseling staff must make themselves available to family members to answer any questions and help make decisions about students' academic futures.*

In addition to school personnel, family members constitute an important part of the support network that encourages students to go to college. Numerous studies have indicated that

family involvement in a child's education contributes significantly to student educational success (Bloom, 1964, 1981; Bronfenbrenner, 1974; Clark, 1983; Goodson & Hess, 1975; Henderson, 1987; Moles, 1987; Rich, 1985; Rich, Mattox & Van Dien, 1979; U.S. Department of Education, 1986; Walberg, 1984) and that one of the strongest predictors of college aspirations is parental support and encouragement (Hossler, Schmit & Vesper, 1999, McDonough, 1999). In fact, a national study found that the odds of enrolling in college for students whose parents frequently discussed college-related matters with them were twice those of students whose parents rarely or never spoke with them about college (Horn & Chen, 1998).

It has been well documented that parents, regardless of race or socioeconomic status, view higher education as extremely important for their children (Immerwahr & Foleno, 2000). At the same time, research indicates that many parents, especially those from underrepresented groups and those who have not gone to college, lack familiarity with and essential information about the college preparation process (Delgado-Gaitan, 1990; McDonough, 1999; Padron, 1992; Pérez, 1999). Specifically, parents may not have access to basic information that helps them to distinguish between different kinds of colleges, admissions requirements, and especially standardized college entrance exams and financial aid options (McDonough, 1999). These parents desire specific information to support their children as they envision and pursue their educational paths (Chapleau, 2000; McDonough, 1999; Perez, 1999).

While much of the literature has focused only on the role of parents, other role models and caretakers of students, such as siblings, aunts and uncles, and grandparents, can and do also support students as they navigate the path to college, broadening the network to include all members of the family as possible advocates for the student (Jun and Colyar, forthcoming). This support can perhaps best take place in the form of a partnership with the school. In the words of

one principal, "There has to be a certain amount of responsibility in the family, the parents, and the children, and the school, that we're all going to work towards achieving the goal of getting a postsecondary education, and not accepting anything less."

How can schools engage family members as partners in the process? This project has provided valuable insights on the importance of family involvement as well as strategies to encourage meaningful family participation in increasing students' college-going rates. For example, the Creating a College Culture project has worked with cluster schools at all levels (K-12) to offer events such as a year-end College Fair at a local community college. Family members had the opportunity to speak with college representatives from across the country and to sit in on workshops that addressed topics ranging from on-line college searching to study habits to financial preparation for college.

College coaches also worked closely with university scholars to create a series of workshops targeting middle school parents and guardians. The workshops were presented concurrently in Spanish and English, and family members were invited to help plan the workshops as well as evaluate them once the workshops were held. The evaluations confirmed what the literature had already revealed: Family members were hungry for concrete information about college (financial aid, the application process, etc.) and were eager for an opportunity to get involved with their children's schools. (For more information about these workshops, please see McClafferty, McDonough & Fann, 2001.)

Family involvement requires personal contacts and connections with families and creating a warm, welcoming climate for their participation. Schools interested in increasing family involvement in the college preparation process might ask themselves: What opportunities exist for parents to visit the school? Is there a range of opportunities, offered at a variety of times

of day and days of the week? How do parents learn about what is happening in the school? Are multiple means of communication employed? Do teachers and counselors recognize parents and other family members as full partners in the college choice process?

Engaging family members in the college preparation process is not always an easy task, especially at the outset. Parents may not be comfortable participating in school activities because they may feel they lack the necessary knowledge, see themselves as "outsiders," or perceive historical or structural barriers to doing so (Auerbach, 2001; Lareau & Horvat, 1999; Padron, 1992; Smith; 2001). Given the powerful influence that families have on student expectations, aspirations, and preparation, however, this important component cannot be overlooked.

College Partnerships

Forming active links between the school and local colleges and universities is vital to the creation of a college culture. This facilitates the organization of college-related activities such as field trips to college campuses or college fairs, and the provision of academic enrichment programs, all of which raise awareness of and aspirations toward college.

As part of an emerging K-16 movement, educators and policymakers from both K-12 and higher education have begun to emphasize the importance of including colleges as partners in efforts to raise student achievement, aspirations for, and enrollment in college (Feldman, 1999; Haycock, 1997, 1998; Harkavy, 1999). Such partnerships can take many forms and serve to increase student awareness of and preparation for a variety of postsecondary opportunities. In the Creating a College Culture project, for example, forming active links between the university and the cluster's middle and high schools has helped to build a college culture through the provision of college-related activities such as field trips to college campuses or college fairs, funding for taking standardized tests, and academic enrichment programs. Through these close connections, students gain a greater sense of what college life is like and the ability to visualize being in college. One middle school principal affirmed the importance of these types of activities:

> I think it's very important that the children have an opportunity to see people at the university that look like them. You know, they go to a place like UCLA and they see Latinos, they see blacks, they see Asians, they see Whites. People that look just like they do. So that further inspires them that they too, can go to college.

Several schools established and expanded tutoring programs that brought together college students with high school and middle school students. These programs not only helped students academically, but also exposed them to college students who share backgrounds similar to their own. One principal described the value of a program called UCLA Bruin Partners, which brings UCLA undergraduates in to work with sixth graders a few times a week: "...they can actually see a live person that's going to college. They can ask him direct questions and get specific answers about what college life is like. ... What better than to have somebody who's actually been there to share their experience with?"

Articulation

> *Students should have a seamless experience where a college message is communicated from kindergarten through 12th grade. As such, there must be ongoing communication between counselors and teaching staff among all schools in a feeder group. Work being done at each school site should be coordinated with activities at other levels.*

Andy Hargreaves (1994) explains that while collaboration is rarely part of a wide scale reform effort, "school improvement, curriculum reform, teacher development and leadership development are all seen to some extent as dependent on the building of positive collegial relationships for their success" (p. 187). Hargreaves goes on to explain the essential components of collaboration, all of which tie into the notion that collaboration must be part of the school culture. Specifically, he notes that collaborative working relationships must emerge voluntarily and spontaneously from the workers within the school toward a common goal. Rather than occurring only at scheduled intervals and in structured ways, collaborations must be pervasive and unpredictable. To be sure, they must be rooted in the culture of the school.

This understanding of collaboration is essential to the success of cultural change initiatives like the one described in this paper. In particular, although Hargreaves' ideas were generated with individual schools in mind, it is clear that this sort of collaboration across school levels has significant benefits for students (Ryan, 2002). Transition programs that serve the needs of students, parents, and school staff can positively influence both achievement and retention in the high school years (Smith, 1997). Moreover, there is evidence to suggest that programs addressing the transition from middle school to high school – emphasizing curricular connections across the two sectors or encouraging students to plan for future educational and career opportunities, for example – can help students sustain achievement in vital college preparatory courses (Nielsen-Andrew et al., 1997; Rice, 1997; Visher, Lauen, Merola, & Medrich, 1998).

The Creating a College Culture project has had success in forming connections across school levels. For instance, the counseling process has begun to be more fluid, with greater integration of counseling work across levels. High school and middle school counseling staffs, in particular, are relying on each other to a greater degree and pooling resources to increase the impact of their work. At the whole school level, teams comprised of principals, assistant principals, counselors, department chairs, and parent representatives have met individually and in their vertical teams to clarify each school's college culture goals. An all-day meeting provided the opportunity for extended discussion and collaboration within and among teams. Participants learned of current research related to college access, discussed data relevant to the schools in their feeder patterns (e.g., test scores and graduation rates), and met in small and large groups to identify their strategies for creating and maintaining college cultures in their schools.

Through careful articulation across all school levels, students receive a consistent message, rather than separate bits of information that lose both meaning and impact in their isolation. Instead of understanding the school's role in college preparation in three independent stages – elementary school, middle school, and high school – it must be understood in the seamless and uninterrupted way that it occurs in students' lives.

CONCLUSION

Much is known about the barriers that stand in the way of underrepresented students as they look toward higher education. After decades of research, we also know quite a bit about the factors that are important in helping students aspire to and prepare for college. Still, no reform has had significant, lasting success in increasing the proportion of low SES students and students of color on our nation's college campuses.

The nine principles of a college culture described in the preceding pages are derived from two complementary sources: First, from a careful synthesis of seemingly disparate areas of college access research and second, from several years of experience and best practices emerging from an ongoing college culture partnership. Preparing all students for a full range of postsecondary options is not a simple task. It must be approached from a variety of stances, and it must utilize all available resources. We have chosen a cultural approach to the work because it not only allows but requires both of these.

Changing the culture of a school is a long and difficult process. Precisely what this process would entail was not initially clear to many of the college coaches, counselors, and principals at the outset, and this created a fair share of obstacles in our work. Some have already been mentioned in earlier sections because they are specific to one or more of the nine principles.

Others are more generally tied to the notion of cultural change. In particular, many educators are accustomed to reforms that focus on individual students, rather than on school-wide change. This can lead to resistance, or simply a delay engagement with the work. One college coach, for example, used an analogy to describe her experience of coming to realize what cultural change would really mean:

> There's this guy and he's standing at the bottom of the waterfall. He's catching all these babies (that are) falling over the waterfall. And, everyone's going, 'yay! He said he was gonna save them.' And...he keeps doing it, and he keeps doing it, he keeps saving these babies that are falling over the waterfall. And, then finally somebody says, 'well, why don't we go up on top of the waterfall and see who's throwing the kids down there.' ... A month later it hits me like 'oh yeah! Why don't we figure out the cause of this!?

Student-centered work – such as individual meetings, focused class presentations, and college-related activities – continues to be invaluable in our partnership schools in raising students' college awareness. This work alone does not directly bring about cultural change, however. As explained above, cultural change is more deeply-rooted and longer lasting. It is not dependent upon a single individual who meets with a subset of students; it is dependent upon the entire school. It requires climbing to the top of the proverbial waterfall to find out what's going on, and then committing resources, time, and energy to changing the situation for the better. While we do not wish to make a case for the end of student-centered work, we are arguing that alternate approaches – in particular, work toward cultural change – must also be implemented if all students are to be prepared for a range of postsecondary options.

The obstacles we have encountered in our work toward cultural change are described in greater detail elsewhere (McClafferty & McDonough, 2000). They are important to mention here, however, because they place the preceding nine principles in a realistic context. Cultural change does not happen easily, but the payoffs derived from a concerted effort toward it are significant and persistent.

The work described in this paper highlights the need for schools to make the college mission a priority. More importantly, the paper lays out a framework for transforming the school culture that is based on both existing research and practical experience. This plan is respectful of the differences between local school sites and the individual actors within them. As such, it is our hope that the paper will assist educators in preparing more students for all post-secondary options and, in turn, contribute to the creation of an educational system that is more equitable and just. If schools are going to be more responsive to college missions, they need to build infrastructure: they need to make the college mission a priority in their schools and get teachers, counselors and parents focused on how they can each make it a part of their daily workloads. In short, through thoughtful, collaborative work, the cultures of our schools must be transformed.

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Printed Name/Position/Title: Karen McClafferty / Visiting Asst. Prof

Organization/Address: UCLA GSE+IS 405 Hilgard Ave Box 951521 LA, CA 90095-1521

Telephone: 310 206 1207

FAX:

E-Mail Address: mcclafferty@gseis.ucla.edu

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